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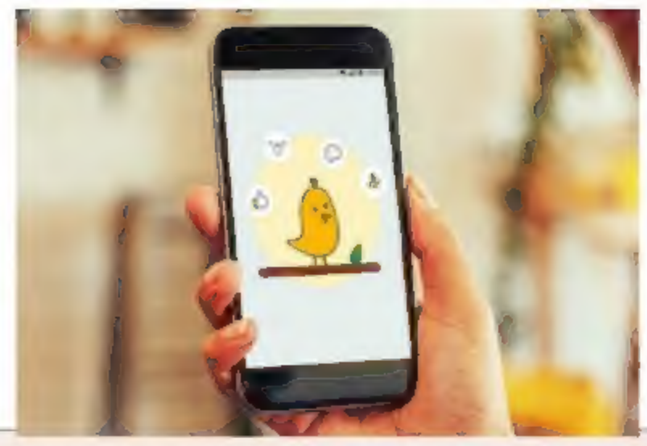

KOO BECOMES 100% DESI AS CHINESE INVESTOR EXITS

A bunch of Indians, including ex-cricketer Javagal Srinath, buy out Shunwei Capital's stake in Koo, India's answer to Twitter

START-UP A-LISTERS BUY OUT SHUNWEI STAKE

Flipkart CEO Kalyan Krishnamurthy, BookMyShow founder Ashish Hemrajani, Udaan co-founder Sujeet Kumar and Zerodha founder Nikhil Kamat were the others who bought out Shunwei's 9% stake in Bombinate Technologies Pvt Ltd, which runs Koo. The homegrown microblogging platform has not revealed the financial details of the latest deal | P13

TRACTION AFTER GOVT-TWITTER TUSSLE

- Koo has so far raised around $4.1 million from investors including 3one4 Capital, Kalaari Capital, and Blume Ventures
- Koo first caught public attention after Centre's tussle with Twitter over the removal of inflammatory contents
- It is available in Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati & Marathi

4 million
PEOPLE HAVE DOWNLOADED KOO SO FAR. ONE MILLION OF THEM ARE ACTIVE USERS

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MODI FLAGS VAX WASTAGE, SEEKS CORRECTIVE STEPS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE issue of humongous Covid-19 vaccine wastage by a few states figured prominently in a meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi had with chief ministers on Wednesday.

While 6.5% of vaccine doses are getting wasted in the country on an average, peak wastage is at Telangana. Modi advised the states to immediately introduce correctives in planning and governance at the local level.

"It should be reviewed in states as to why is the vaccine wastage happening. Monitoring must be done every evening and people should be contacted proactively (for correctives) so that there's no wastage," he stressed.

Later in the day, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan shared data on states where vaccine wastage is more than the national average **(see graphic)**. They are J&K (6.6%), Karnataka (6.9%), UP (9.4%), Andhra Pradesh (11.6%) and Telangana (17.6%). On the other hand, Himachal Pradesh, at 1.4%, is the best performing state.

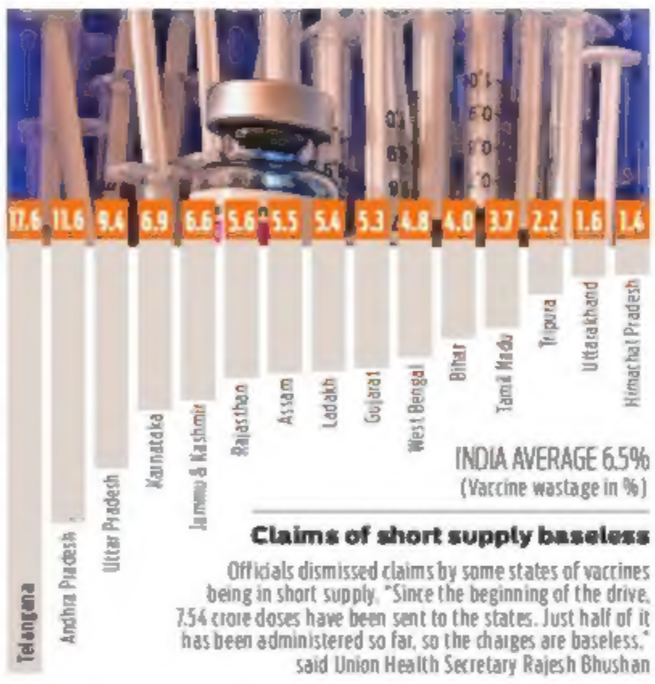
"In the current scenario, Covid-19 vaccine doses are like elixir and should be used very judiciously," said V K Paul, member (health), Niti Aayog in the briefing.

Talking to this newspaper, sources in the Health Ministry explained that the wastage is happening more in Covaxin, as compared to Covishield.

"There are two reasons. One, Covaxin has more doses (20) per vial than Covishield (10). As all doses have to be administered within four hours of a vial being opened, it naturally means that doses that are not used within the time frame get wasted," said an official.

"Second, before the efficacy data for Covaxin was announced, fewer people turned up at centres for this vaccine, resulting in wastage," the official pointed out.

LOSING PRECIOUS DROPS



Claims of short supply baseless

Officials dismissed claims by some states of vaccines being in short supply. "Since the beginning of the drive, 7.54 crore doses have been sent to the states. Just half of it has been administered so far, so the charges are baseless," said Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan

TMC manifesto offers universal basic income

PRANAB MONDAL @ Kolkata

Mamata releasing TMC manifesto in Kolkata on Wednesday | BIBHASH LODH

THE Trinamool Congress, which is bracing for a tough fight with the BJP in the Assembly polls, on Wednesday released its manifesto promising universal basic income, financial grant to women family heads, credit card for students pursuing higher education, home delivery of ration and five lakh new jobs every year.

"This is not a political manifesto. It is a manifesto for development. We will fulfil all our goals mentioned in the manifesto," said TMC supremo and West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee while releasing the 66-page document on Wednesday.

The manifesto promises a monthly income support of ₹500 for households in the general category and ₹1,000 for SC/ST. The amount would be directly deposited to the bank accounts of 1.6 crore female heads of the families. Sources said the budget outlay for the scheme will be ₹12,900 crore annually.

"This is a smart announcement to win the support of women voters who comprise 50% of the state's total electorates," said a TMC leader.

However, the income support will not be available to households that have a tax-paying member or own more than two hectares of land.

Another notable promise is that the poor and underprivileged don't have to go to ration shops if the TMC retains power in Bengal. "Dedicated personnel will deliver food grains at the door-step of 1.5 crore households," Mamata said.

Eyeing young electorates pursuing higher education, the party offered student credit cards with low interest.

"Students pursuing graduation and post-graduation shall be eligible to receive the credit card with a limit up to ₹10 lakh at a subsidised rate of 4% interest. The scheme will benefit more than 1.5 crore students in the next five years," Mamata announced. P9

After review meeting with PM, Yediyurappa said three Covid Care Centres will be set up in Bengaluru

CM pitches for jabs to all age groups

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister B S Yediyurappa on Wednesday said three Covid-19 care centres will be set up in Bengaluru to address the rising number of cases. "The positivity rate, as of March 15 in Karnataka, was 1.65 per cent. Cases are on the rise, especially in Bengaluru and districts that share their borders with Maharashtra and Kerala. We will expand our vaccination drive," the CM said.

Participating in a video conference of Chief Ministers with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Yediyurappa also pushed for Covid-19 vaccinations for all, irrespective of age or vulnerabilities. He said Karnataka will enhance vigil on the state's borders — where cases are on an upward swing — and invest in awareness campaigns, considering the surge in the number of Covid-19 cases. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked for testing and tracing to be enhanced in Bengaluru and Bidar, the two districts that are seeing a spike in positivity rates.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa interacts with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during the latter's video conference with CMs, in Bengaluru on Wednesday | EXPRESS

Speaking to the media after his interaction with the PM, Yediyurappa reiterated that there will be no lockdown or curfew and pointed out that the PM had stressed on not pushing people into panic. "The PM has appreciated Karnataka's use of RT-PCR tests accounting for 93 per cent of total tests being conducted. We have requested the for vaccination drive to be taken up at old age homes and apartment complexes. We have also asked the Centre to consider administering vaccines to everybody, irrespective of age," Yediyurappa said. P3

WHAT'S THE PLAN

- No lockdown or curfew
- Covid-19 norms like wearing of masks, social distancing to be compulsory
- Large gatherings to be regulated
- Increased awareness campaigns
- Aim to inoculate 3 lakh people daily

It's official, second Covid-19 peak coming

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

INDIA is headed towards a second peak of coronavirus, the government confirmed on Wednesday. The difference this time is that it will not be the metros but tier-2 and tier-3 cities closer to the rural areas that will be the worst hit.

"We are seeing an emerging second peak," said Dr V K Paul, member (health), Niti Aayog, who also heads the national task force on Covid-19.

Over the past two weeks, small towns across 70 districts have seen a steep rise of over 150% in new cases, with Ratlam (MP) recording a shocking 500% spike. Fifty-five districts in 17 states have seen a 100-150% spike in the same time period.

The alarming statistics also came up during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with chief ministers on Wednesday. The PM urged the CMs to stop the 'emerging second peak' with decisive steps including strict enforcement of Covid protocols. "Wherever necessary, micro-containment zones should be declared without hesitation," he said, adding, "If we don't stop Covid right now, there could be a nationwide outbreak."

According to the details shared by the Union Health Ministry, India now has over 2.34 lakh active Covid-19 cases. Over the past two weeks, there has been a 43% week-on-week increase in cases and 37% rise in deaths. Data shows that Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu continue to report a high number of daily new cases. SEE GRAPH: P3, P10

EXPRESS READ

IAF Group Captain killed in MiG-21 Bison accident

New Delhi: A Group Captain of the Indian Air Force was killed in an accident involving a MiG-21 Bison aircraft in Gwalior on Wednesday. The pilot has been identified as Group Captain A Gupta. The accident took place at 10:50 am, when the aircraft was taking off.

SC terms cancelling 3 cr ration cards as 'serious'

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday termed cancellation of around three crore ration cards by the Centre due to non-linking with Aadhaar card as 'too serious', and sought response from the Centre and states on the issue. P10

Setback for BSY as HC allows trial in land case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

IN a major setback to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and former minister Katta Subramanya Naidu, the Karnataka High Court on Wednesday set aside an order passed by the Lokayukta Special Court, dismissing a private complaint filed against them with regard to denotification of land acquired by the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB).

This apart, the high court ordered the special court to proceed with the trial in terms of the chargesheet filed by the Lokayukta police in May 2012. As far as the B-report filed by the Lokayukta police in this case with regard to nine other accused, the high court directed the special court follow guidelines issued by the Supreme Court. Justice John Michael Cunha passed the order to that effect on a petition filed by Alam Pasha.

CONTINUED ON: P7

Bommai promises dedicated legal team for land-grab cases

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

AMID a heated debate over land-grabbing in Karnataka, specially in Bengaluru, Minister for Home and Law & Parliamentary Affairs, Basavaraj Bommai, said he will set up a dedicated team of lawyers for land-related cases if the Revenue department sought one.

Janata Dal Secular MLA A T Ramaswamy tore into the government for refusing to crack down, either on the real estate mafia and land-grabbers, or government officials who are involved in illegal land registration.

Ramaswamy demanded action against land-grabbers under the Goonda Act.

CONTINUED ON: P4

Police chief of Mumbai shunted to limit damage

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

MAHARASHTRA Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday began a damage limitation exercise, shunting out Mumbai Police Commissioner Parambir Singh and replacing him with Hemant Nagrale in the wake of the arrest of controversial police officer Sachin Waze. Till now, Nagrale was holding additional charge of the state Director General of Police.

This newspaper was the first to report that Singh's job was on the line. The transfers were part of a big police department shake-up. Rajnish Seth, director general at the Anti-Corruption Bureau, has been given additional charge of director general of the state police. Singh is now Director General of Home Guard.

Sources said Rajnish Seth was the frontrunner for Mumbai CP but most of the senior

Hemant Nagrale

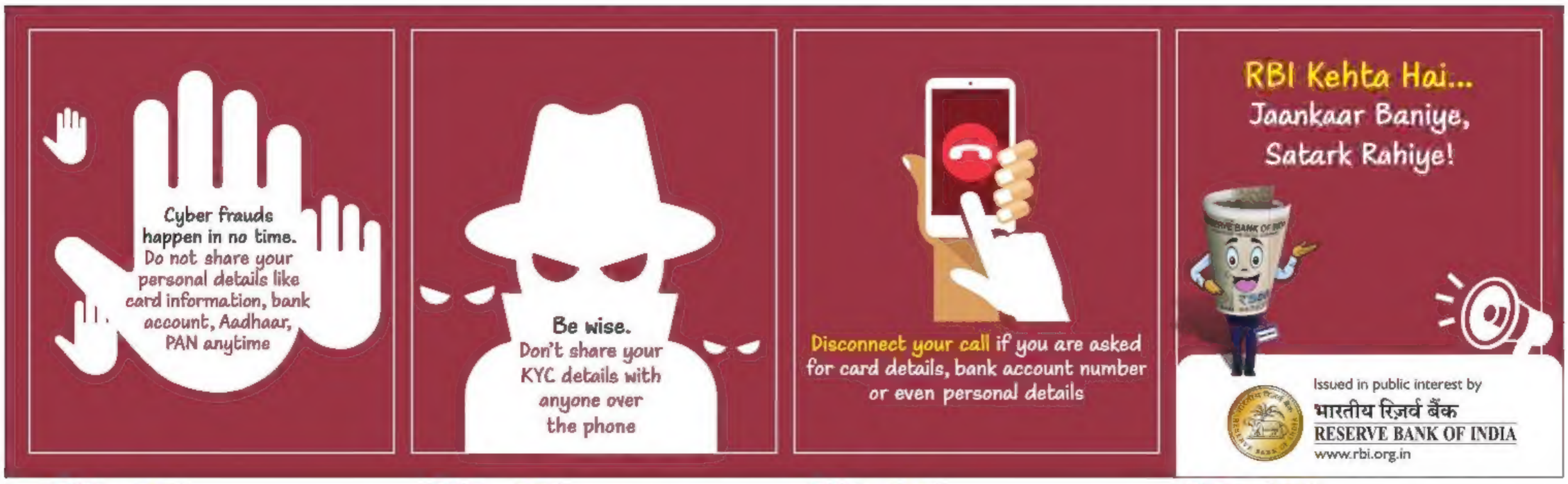
Hails from Chandrapur

Nagrale, a 1987 batch IPS officer, hails from Chandrapur in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra

ministers in ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi insisted on naming a Marathi instead. "So, Nagrale, who was otherwise senior in rank to the Mumbai CP, was brought back as Mumbai CP," he added.

"Singh was NCP chief Sharad Pawar's choice as Mumbai CP. But later, Singh moved out of his orbit and refused to follow orders of Home Minister Anil Deshmukh despite repeated calls in several cases. He also stalled probes on politically significant cases citing pressure from Delhi," the source said requesting anonymity.

CONTINUED ON: P10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